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ABSTRACT

This paper presents specific strategies to assist collaborative consultation efforts by educators of students with disabilities. First, a definition of collaborative consultation is offered and advantages of this approach identified. Next, essential skills and strategies to gain acceptance and establish credibility in collaborative situations are examined. Essential skills include familiarity with both regular and special education programming and good interpersonal communication skills. Specific strategies for consultants include treating others with respect, sharing information about one's own skills, using appropriate language, modeling appropriate listening skills, modeling interview skills, giving and receiving feedback, and exercising situational leadership. Finally, a list of eight steps for initiating and carrying out collaborative consultation is offered. Steps include establishing the relationship, gathering information, identifying the problem, stating the target behavior, generating intervention strategies, implementing the intervention, evaluating the intervention, and withdrawing from the consulting relationship. (22 references) (DB)

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Three is a Crowd? No Way - Three is a Team!
Collaborative Consultation Techniques for Educators

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE
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Three is a Crowd? No Way - Three is a Team!
Collaborative Consultation Techniques
for All Educators

Abstract

Currently, there is emphasis on collaboration practices between regular and special educators in the research literature. Collaborative consultation is a method to improve communication between educators, to facilitate mainstreaming practices, and to provide the most appropriate, individualized educational programs in the least restrictive environment to students with disabilities. The strategies provided will assist educators to work together to creatively provide the most effective educational programming for all students.

The purpose of this article is to propose a number of strategies special educators can use to initiate collaborative consultation programs with regular educators in order to plan more effective educational programs for students with behavioral disorders. First, a definition and advantages for collaborative consultation will be provided. Second, essential skills and strategies to gain acceptance in collaborative situations will be reviewed. The strategies provided will assist educators in establishing the needed credibility to begin and successfully implement collaborative consultation practices. Finally, a list of steps will be presented that educators can follow and adapt as needed to initiate and carry out collaborative consultation.

Collaborative Consultation

West (1987) reported that 68 percent of students with disabilities receive the majority of their education in regular classrooms. Most regular education teachers do not have training to work with students who have learning or behavior problems and

profess that they would rather not, if given the choice (Coates, 1990). It is imperative that all educators begin to share responsibility for all students and begin collaborating with each other to provide effective educational programs for all students.

Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin (1986) explained collaborative consultation as educators working together and sharing in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities. An emphasized concept is that teams of people are more able to effectively generate creative solutions to educational problems than can individuals working in isolation.

Consultation is often considered from a triadic perspective (Tharp, 1975) where a 3-person team including the consultant, the consultee, and the target student work together. The target is usually a student with an academic or behavioral problem. The consultee is typically a classroom teacher who has the influence to improve the problem behavior of the target student. The consultant is usually a person with knowledge or skills to activate the consultee's influence (Idol et al. 1986). Consultants can be regular or special educators, program assistants, speech/language therapists, principals, or parents.

The model of collaborative consultation is based on the premise that both the consultant and consultee have knowledge to share. They are equal partners in a problem-solving venture (Idol et al. 1986). The target student can take an active role in the team process. (S)he needs to be aware of goals and objectives the consultant and consultee are planning. The

consultation team should involve the target student in the team process as much as is appropriate for the student's age, ability to participate, and cognitive level. Part of the student's responsibility might be to learn self-monitoring, self-charting, and/or self-reinforcement skills (Nelson, Smith, Young, & Dodd, 1991). These self-management skills would assist the student to think and solve problems independently and appropriately, a competency which is essential to successful adult adjustment. The consultant, the consultee, and the target student all work as a team (Friend, 1984; Idol et al. 1986).

Advantages of Collaborative Consultation

There are a number of advantages for collaboration in the schools. One advantage is that regular and special educators share their expertise because they have mutual responsibility for the student with special needs (Idol et al. 1986; Pugach & Johnson, 1989). When students are perceived as having learning or behavior problems, they are referred to special education. In effect, this transfers responsibility for the child's education from one educational division to another (Cosden, 1990). Collaborative consultation is based on a student-centered approach that requires joint responsibility between the consultant and the consultee in order to plan and implement the most appropriate, effective, and creative programming for the student with special needs (Cosden, 1990; Morsink, Thomas, & Correa, 1991). Collaborative consultation emphasizes that all students must remain a schoolwide responsibility with regular and

special education teachers working together to plan and implement the most appropriate educational programs. Consequently, special education consultation teachers would also work with students who had not been officially labeled with a specific disability.

A major objective of collaborative consultation is to keep more students in regular education classrooms, reducing the need for "pull out" special education programs (Huefner, 1988). If the majority of educators practiced collaboration, more students with mild disabilities could be educated in the regular classroom (Adamson, Cox, & Schuller, 1989).

Collaborative consultation programs would decrease the number of mislabeled students placed in special education classrooms (Huefner, 1988). The consulting teacher would assist any teacher with any student who was having an academic or behavioral problem. Consulting assistance is not limited to those students who have already been labeled for special education purposes. Examples of erroneously labeled students include slow learners, low achieving students, students with English as a second language, students from economically deprived environments, and minority students. These students may be referred for special education services simply because they learn differently than the typical student.

Cosden (1990) reported that collaborative consultation may be a way to expand services for students with more diverse needs without substantial financial increases. This theory has not been fully tested yet (Idol & West, 1987), but it is projected

that a consultant teacher would be able to assist regular education teachers in dealing with students who have mild disabilities while they remain in the regular education classrooms (Huefner, 1988). This practice would diminish the need for more expensive special education classrooms.

Another advantage is increased communication among regular and special educators and other educational professionals such as speech and language clinicians, guidance counselors, school social workers, parents, and community agencies. The increase in communication is a result of sharing knowledge, experience, materials, resources, and responsibility for the education of the target student (Huefner, 1988; Idol et al. 1986). When educators collaborate, instructional services are based on academic and social learning needs rather on a special education label. Research shows that students with behavior disorders do not learn differently than their peers who show normal or typical behavioral development (Larivee, 1986; Paul & Epanchin, 1991). Consequently, students with mild disabilities would benefit from instruction in the regular education classroom with assistance regarding instructional and/or behavioral adaptations from the consultant, rather than being "pulled out" for special education instruction (Adamson et al. 1989).

Essential Skills for Collaboration

Essential skills for collaborative consultation have been delineated in several research studies. Following is a summary of skills deemed necessary for successful collaboration.

In order to jointly plan an effective program for a student with special needs, the consultant should be familiar with both regular and special education programming including curriculum, materials, teaching methods, and expectations (Center, 1989; Friend, 1984). The consultant also needs to be competent in special education techniques including adaptation of materials, data collection and record keeping, observation techniques, a variety of assessment procedures, and behavior management (Idol & West, 1987; Nelson & Stevens, 1981; West & Cannon, 1988). It is essential that the consultant have good interpersonal communication skills and be able to work cooperatively as a team member (Adamson, Matthews, & Schuller, 1990; Speece & Mandell, 1980).

Strategies for Collaborative Consultation

Idol et al. (1986) proposed a number of strategies consultants can use to gain and provide acceptance in collaborative consultation situations. These strategies were selected as a means to assist consultant teachers to establish collaborative relationships with other teachers.

The **first strategy** is to treat others with respect. This is important in gaining acceptance as a consultant as well as being extremely important throughout the consultation process. Consulting is a collaborative, problem-solving process where the consultants and consultees should have equal opportunities to learn from each other. Both have specific, yet different but equally valued skills and knowledge to share for the benefit of

their students (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). Consultants can model respect for other team members by listening, sharing information, engaging in joint problem solving, and maintaining confidentiality.

The **second strategy** requires the consultants to share information concerning their own skills so that other teachers will be able to decide how and when to ask for assistance.

The **third strategy** is for consultants to use appropriate language that is understandable to the consultee. If it is most appropriate to use an unfamiliar term, the consultant should tactfully explain the new term and the purpose for its use.

The **fourth strategy** is to model appropriate listening skills. This can be done in two different ways. Initially, the consultant can simply keep quiet and listen to what the consultee says. Then, an active listening technique which involves paraphrasing back to the consultee what was said to check for accurate meaning. The consultee will either confirm the paraphrasing or disclaim it and restate the message. This allows for corrections in the interpretation of the original communication if necessary.

The **fifth strategy** is to model the use of interview skills. Interview skills are defined as the ability to conduct verbal interactions that are purposeful and direct and in which one person takes the responsibility for the development of the conversation (Idol et al. 1986). The interview strategy will allow consultant to structure meetings so that the team can

efficiently gain and share information, solve problems, and plan appropriate interventions for students with problems.

The **sixth strategy** is the ability to give and receive feedback. Feedback should be specific, immediate and appropriate. A helpful hint is to identify two areas that deserve positive feedback and one area in need of improvement. The consultant can model this technique by giving feedback to others about his/her own work. For example, "I think you did a great job of using a variety of specific verbal reinforcers and you provided them very consistently. Now you need to work on collecting data consistently in order to document the wonderful progress being made!" Give credit to others for their ideas and accomplishments. This procedure is a method of empowering group members. It results in increased willingness to identify and solve problems.

Another type of feedback involves responding to conflicts and disagreements. They are inevitable in group situations at school. The goal is for the consultant to model confrontation skills so that no one loses face. All team members should learn to use I-messages to express their needs, feelings, and concerns rather than blaming anyone else for the conflict or problem situation. They have to work together to find creative and mutually acceptable solutions to problems.

The **seventh and final strategy** is for the consultant to learn to use situational leadership. The consultant needs to continually adjust his/her leadership style to the attitude and

the skill levels of the consultees. Additional factors to consider are the consultee's willingness to work with the consultant and the consultee's own skills and knowledge in the area of educational techniques. These seven strategies (Idol et al. 1986) can be used to assist the consultant in gaining acceptance and cooperation from different educational personnel.

The Process Of Collaboration

The general process implemented in consultation is based on the focus, type of problem, and the persons involved (West, 1985). The following eight steps have been suggested by Morsink et al. (1991) to establish successful collaboration practices.

1. **Establish the relationship**: Meet and establish trust with the consultee. The consultant is usually contacted by the consultee who is in need of assistance to deal with a student who has a problem (Idol et al. 1986).

2. **Gather information**: Check a variety of sources to obtain background information concerning both academic and behavioral problems.

3. **Identify the problem**: Determine the history and the frequency of the problem defining it in observable, measurable terms. Collect data through structured observations to assist in problem definition (Howell & McCollum-Gahley, 1986).

4. **State the target behavior**: Consider whether the behavior needs to be increased or decreased. Decide on a mastery criteria. Remember to teach an appropriate, positive replacement behavior for every behavior that is reduced or extinguished.

5. **Generate intervention strategies**: These are methods to teach the student to master the target behavior. Where possible, emphasize independence for the student with self-management procedures (Morgan & Jenson, 1988; Nelson et al, 1991). The consultation team should discuss options to consider and prioritize which should be attempted first. These strategies must be agreeable to the consultee, otherwise they are not going to be successful. Give gentle suggestions. Do not try to force ideas or methods on other teachers (Adamson et al. 1990).

6. **Implement the intervention**: Put the intervention into effect and collect data on the success or failure of the procedure. Be willing to go into the regular education classroom to demonstrate suggested procedures (Adamson et al. 1990).

7. **Evaluate the intervention**: Review observation data that has been collected and decide whether mastery criteria has been reached or whether revisions for the program are needed. If the intervention has not been successful, assist in revision of the plan.

8. **Withdraw from the consulting relationship**: End the process when the goal has been reached or when an agreement has been made not to continue. The ending point can be predetermined at the start of the project. For example, the consultation team might decide to implement an intervention with a student for a predetermined amount of time before referring him/her for a specialized evaluation or assessment.

Summary

In conclusion, information has been provided to assist in establishing successful collaborative consultation practices between all educational professionals. The triadic model of collaborative consultation including the consultant, consultee, and the target student was discussed. It is of paramount importance that practitioners understand that the goal of collaborative consultation is creative and innovative teamwork and joint responsibility among regular and special educators in planning individualized educational programs for students with disabilities. A summary of consultation strategies was provided to assist educators with establishing credibility and appropriate consultative practices. Finally, general steps outlining the collaborative consultation process were provided to facilitate implementation by educational professionals and parents. These strategies and steps will assist the collaborative consultation team to work together to provide the most effective educational programming for students with learning and behavior problems.

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